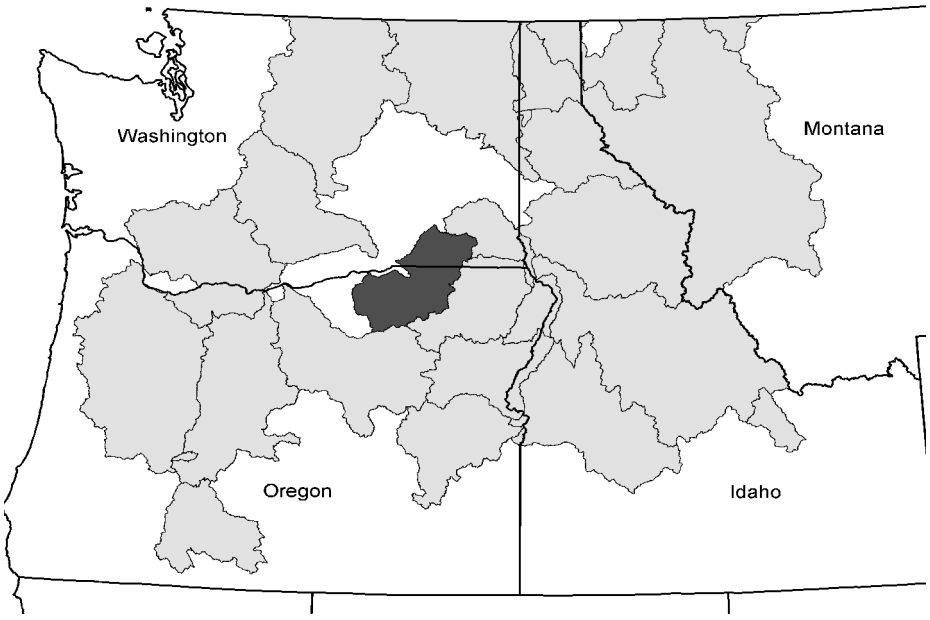
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Umatilla/Walla Walla Rivers Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 10)



What areas are included in the Umatilla/Walla Walla Rivers Recovery Unit?

The Umatilla -Walla Walla Recovery Unit is located in northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. The unit includes streams extending across portions of Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa counties in Oregon, and Walla Walla and Columbia counties in Washington. The Umatilla River enters the Columbia River downstream of McNary Dam in Oregon, and the Walla Walla River enters the Columbia just upstream of McNary Dam, about 50 miles upstream of the mouth of the Umatilla River.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

The proposed critical habitat unit includes 395 miles of streams within two core areas, which is about 7 percent of the total stream miles in the two river basins. In the Umatilla River Basin, 177 stream miles, have been proposed for critical habitat designation, including portions of Meacham Creek and the North and South Forks of the Umatilla River. About 218 stream miles have been proposed for designation in the Walla Walla River Basin, including portions of the Touchet River, Mill Creek, and the North and South Forks of the Walla Walla River.

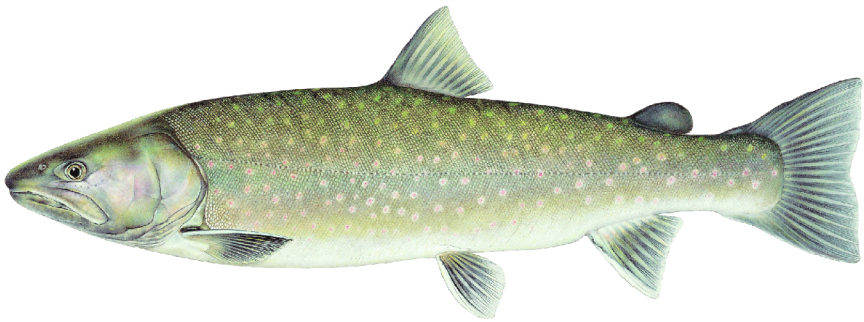
Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of the species by identifying those areas essential for conservation

and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.



Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat.

It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. In most cases where a link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring where bull trout currently occur.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business (not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur) would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the state of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recovery Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds

What is the status of bull trout in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit?

Currently, there are four known bull trout local populations in this unit, three in the Walla Walla River basin and one in the Umatilla River basin.

Within the Umatilla Basin; bull trout local populations in the South Fork Umatilla River and Meacham Creek are considered to be at high risk of extirpation, while the local population in the North Fork Umatilla River is larger, but still considered to be depressed and of special concern.

Within the Walla Walla Basin, bull trout local populations are at high risk of extirpation in the North Fork Walla Walla River, at low risk of extirpation in the South Fork Walla Walla River, and of special concern in Mill Creek. The status of bull trout in the Touchet River is largely unknown.

What are the threats to bull

trout in the Umatilla – Walla Walla Recovery Unit?

Fish habitat in the Umatilla -Walla Walla Recovery Unit has been altered significantly by historic and current land use practices. Land uses affecting bull trout habitat in the Umatilla and Walla Walla Basins include water diversions for crop and pasture irrigation, forest management practices, poorly managed livestock grazing, urbanization along rivers, and flood control practices. Habitat alterations have affected not only bull trout, but anadromous fish as well. Salmon and steelhead are considered an important part of the historic prey base for bull trout. Historic fish management practices for bull trout, efforts to eradicate bull trout, and stocking of brook trout have also been factors in the decline of bull trout.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex, interacting groups of bull trout distributed throughout the species' native range, so that the species can be delisted. To achieve this goal the following objectives have been identified for bull trout in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit:

• Maintain the current distribution of bull trout within the core areas and reestablish bull trout in previously occupied habitats.
• Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit.
• Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.
• Conserve genetically diverse populations of bull trout populations within the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes the following specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria:

* **Distribution criteria** will be met when bull trout are distributed among six or more local populations in the recovery unit, three in the Umatilla Core area and three or more in the Walla Walla Core Area.

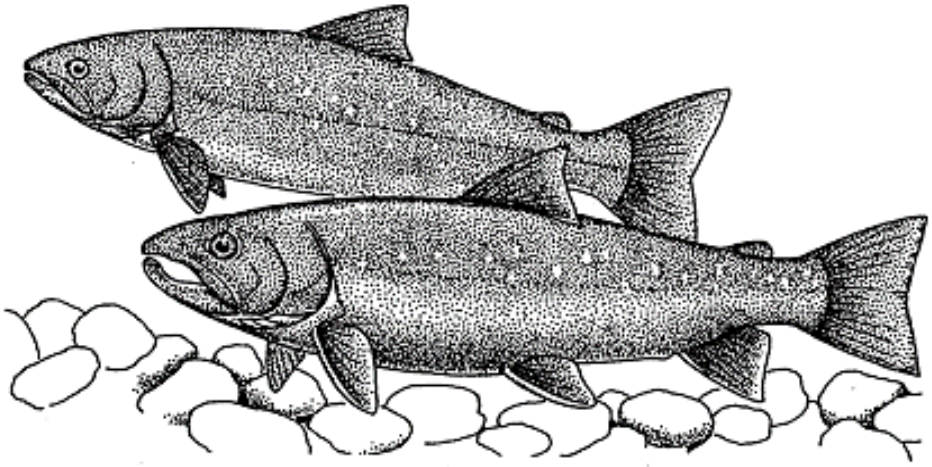
* **Abundance criteria** will be met when estimated abundance of adult bull trout is a range between 3,500 to 10,000 individuals in the recovery unit distributed in each core area as follows: Umatilla Core Area from 500 to 5,000; Walla Walla Core Area 3,000 to 5,000.

*** Trend criteria** will be met when adult bull trout exhibit a stable or increasing trend in abundance for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level within the recovery unit.

* **Connectivity criteria** will be met when specific barriers to bull trout movement in the Umatilla -Walla Walla Recovery Unit have been addressed.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Umatilla – Walla Walla Recovery Unit?

Efforts to recover anadromous species are already ongoing in both basins with a high level of cooperation between fishery entities on various projects. Actions to recover bull trout in this unit generally consist of enhancing stream habitat and



channel conditions, improving riparian habitat, restoring springs, improving stream flows, and restoring fish passage. A detailed list of actions is available in the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan, Umatilla -Walla Walla Recovery Unit, Chapter 10.

How long will recovery take?

Expected time necessary to achieve recovery will vary among recovery units due to differences in bull trout status, factors affecting bull trout, implementation and effectiveness of recovery tasks, and responses to recovery tasks. A tremendous amount of work will be required to restore impaired habitat, reconnect habitat, and eliminate threats from nonnative species. Three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possibly longer, may be necessary before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting. In the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit bull trout currently exist in very numbers in some local populations, and degradation and fragmentation of bull trout habitat presents significant migratory challenges for fluvial fish. Ultimately, these threats must be addressed in the near future if recovery will be achieved.

How much will recovery cost?

Total estimated cost of bull trout recovery in the Umatilla-Walla Walla Recovery Unit is estimated at about $24 million spread over a 25 year recovery period. Successful recovery of bull trout in the recovery unit is contingent on removing barriers and improving habitat conditions within the Umatilla and Walla Walla Rivers and their respective tributaries in Oregon and Washington. Total costs include estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. These costs are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species will also benefit. Cost estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at www.species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003.

Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

A public information meeting and hearing are scheduled in Spokane, WA January 9, 2003, at the West Coast Grand Hotel, 303 West North River Drive and in Pendleton, OR at the Red Lion Hotel, 304 S.E. Nye Ave, January 16, 2003. The information meetings will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.